PART III

PUJYAYA RAGHAVENDRAYA SATHYADHARMARATHAYA CHA

BHAJATHAM KLAPAVRIKSHAYA NAMATHAM KAMADHENAVE

As a continuation of my study of the description of Sri Manthralaya Prabhugalu in Dasa sahithya, I would be happy to share another well known Krithi by Sri Abhinava Janardana Vittala (also known as Prema Dasaru), a very great devotee of Sri Rayaru, who lived in the early 18 th century about an actual visit to Manthralaya and vision of the Guru. It starts with the significant expression – “Nodide Gurugala Nodide” - “I saw the great teacher – I saw Him”. It describes a complete trip to Manthralaya in his time along with the spiritual experiences of a great devotee. Even if we can not experience such bliss ourselves directly, by sharing his, we will be taking a small step forward towards the goal of unalloyed bliss without any sorrow, if we listen reverently to what he says with his own words. My humble intention is to bring out the glorious personality of Sri Manthralaya Prabhugalu as depicted by his own close devotees.

I am covering the krithi by a brief summary in English to keep the length of the essay within reasonable limits, mainly for the benefit of those who cannot read the original in Kannada. In many places one is clearly informed that the sight of the Guru is not just superficial like most of us, but is spiritual and actual for the great devotee. For those who can do so, Some of these are marked in a different colour. I suggest that they do not miss the spiritual treat of reading the original itself. I am basing the actual content on my 60 years old publication of Sri Varadendra Sahithya Mandali, edited by Sri Gorabalu Hanumantha Rao.

“Nodidenu Guru Raghavendrara, Nodidenu sukhasandrara

Nodidenu dharauneesurendrara, nodidenu suyatheendrara”

I saw Sri Raghavendra Guru who is the embodiment of bliss and is the lord of the gods residing on the earth and is an excellent ascetic.

This place is very sacred on earth, where Prahlada performed an unprecedented sacrifice having given up pride and attachment (to worldly objects). This ascetic is one of the main expounders of the philosophy of the all knowing Acharya Madhva. This place called Manthralaya on the bank of the Thungabhadra river (the daughter of the Boar incarnation of Vishnu) to the north of Yadavagiri. The great son (successor) of Sri Upendra – Sri Vadindra followed Sri Rayaru here (in his final resting place).

Knowing all this I started from my village reciting again and again Raghavendra swami and Govinda and dancing with love, and (finally came) and saw the abode of Sri Rayaru from a distance.

Coming closer and offering Sashtanga prostrations and going round the Prakara (surrounding yard), I saw the Hanuman installed by Sri Yogindra and offered my obeisance mentally.

Every year on the second day of Krishna Paksha Dvithiya of Shravana Masa, crowds of people from all areas between the Himalayas and Rameswaram having heard the world wide reputation of the Guru come eagerly here. I saw with my own eyes the glorious sight.

(It is inferred that Sri Premadasaru was visiting Manthralayam on the occasion of the Aradhane of Sri Rayaru).

Without any delay, I settled down in the town, and went to the Thungabhadra river for a cleansing bath. Having recited the samkalpa ritual, I offered Arghyas with proper mental understanding to the (holy Tirthas like) Ganga etc (immanent in the river).

I extolled the (Thungabhadra) river which was born from the Jaws of the Boar incarnation of Vishnu flowing towards Srishaila and prayed that it may purify and protect me (from evil). After the bath, I put on my body the Pundra marks (12 signs of Vishnu), and without wasting time, I performed Japas at the proper time.

Worshipping God, the lord of the redeemed, and reciting the (well known) stothra of Sri Rayaru composed by Appannacharya and going into the premises and having seen the Saint whose greatness was well known, I prayed for his grace to him with complete devotion that I am very poor and humble.

Then I performed Sashtanga prostrations to the limit of my capacity with my head bent with humility to the great master of Yoga, I performed many rounds with love towards him. I saw with my yogic vision his bathing in Panchamrutha and Holy Ganga water.

Wearing the 12 holy marks and the Mudras, Gandha and Akshathe and garlands of flowers and accepting the holy Naivedya and offerings from devotees, Sri Rayaru was shown the Mangala Arathi (ritual waving of the lights of different types and numbers in his presence).

I saw this Guru, who was coronated by Guru Sudhindra with his lotus-like hands and who was first born from the queen of Hiranyakshipu (as her son Prahlada), then as King Bahlika and afterwards he has composed the bliss-giving Chandrika as Vyasa Raja,

I saw this enclosure which is like a divine temple, where the Guru is like a Kalpa Vriksha (the Tree which gives all desired gifts to its worshippers), with his two holy feet being the origin (Roots), arms being branches, smiles like flowers on the Tree, with many brahmanas (birds) around himself (tree). I saw how exquisite gifts (blessings) were being given by him.

Sri Rayaru is usually compared to the legendary Kalpa Vriksha (Divine wish-tree) Kamadhenu (Celestial Cow which fulfills all wishes), and Chinthamani (sacred wish-jewel), which can give all gifts wished for. The two other Wish-sources are next compared to Sri Rayaru, by Sri Premadasaru).

People from all over the world think that he is the Kamadhenu for those who desire (Kama) and Chinthamani for those who think (chinthana) about him with love in their hearts and shows his munificence here. Thus they perform marriages, Upanayanas etc with his grace here.

I praised this deity who is the savant who has traversed the far ends of (or mastered) the Milk ocean of the compositions of Acharya Madhva. This learned scholar has won over the virulent god of desires (Manmatha - Kama) like the three eyed Iswara (Thrinethri). Thus, good people offer their prostrations to him. May his speech, pure like the divine Ganga lead his devotees to attain salvation.

He is proficient in both Purva Mimamsa and Utthara Mimamsa and is always engaged in contemplation of the feet of Hari, which are served by groups of gods and highly evolved

ascetics (Hamsas). May the speech of this great Guru pure and vast like the divine Ganga protect the devotees.

May the preaching of this great Guru's blessed words which is like the divine River (Ganga) consisting of crocodiles such as the intrinsic difference between the soul and Supreme Being, the gradation among the souls, the irrefutable and unalloyed reality of the Universe and the nature of the Supreme Lord being full of infinite auspicious attributes, which destroys the Tenet of Identity of the soul and God render us pure and holy.

This is a summary in Kannada of the first three stanzas of Sri Rayara sthothra by Sri Appannacharya in Sanskrit, where he is prayed to purify our speech and thoughts – by virtue of his own total freedom from defects like worldly desires, anger etc and his complete mastery of Acharya Madhva's Shasthras leading to redemption. Both He and his grace are compared to the divine river Ganga and words like Hamsa (evolved ascetics – swans), are used to give a word picture of the Holy river as well as Sri Rayaru.

This great holy place is full of great ascetics headed by Acharya Madhva who are describing or listening to (discourses on) the qualities of Hari. I praised with love the great Swamiji who worships the lotus feet of (the Supreme Being in the forms of) Rama, Krishna and Vedavyasa.

Note the congruence with the words of Vijaya Daasru etc.

I saw that everywhere, there are lessons being taught, Puranas being recited, stothras of the Guru being rendered and Japas being performed. Those who are gifted with special knowledge enjoy the scene. I praised the greatness of the Guru (in whose presence all these happen).

I saw that some people carry Arathi (lamps) on their heads, some people roll over sideways (around) the Prakara - Dindu and offer prostrations on the ground, and groups of women and men perform sevas (services) in batches with their head bent forward (in humility and supplication). I praised the greatness of the Guru (in whose presence all these happen).

After seeing all these enthusiastically, I took the Tirtha of the holy lotus-feet of Rayaru which is the destroyer of all sins, and also prostrated to the Vrindavana of Sri Vadindra nearby and offering Dhoopa, Dipa and Naivedya along with fruits and prostrating, I eulogised him in many ways.

There were groups of Brahmins sitting on the flat stone-boulders of the river (for Tirtha prasada), many types of food – specially made Bhakshya, Paramanna and vegetable preparations, Rice and very special dishes fried in ghee being offered to them. I ate along with them (such a wonderful meal).

Then I performed the evening Sandhya on the river bank and reciting songs and prostrating in the presence of the great Guru. I saw that rows of lamps were lit and with musical instruments like Thala, Jhangati, Vadya (saxophones) being sounded, the Mangalarathi series of various types were offered to the Guru.

In this manner, seeing the various rites being offered in front of the Guru from beginning to the end and Arathis being performed along with recital of sthothras, and giving Mathrakshatha followed by the same offered to Sri Vadindra Rayaru, I saw every seva right from the Sun rise to the Sunset.

On the third day, when one saw the wonderful and holy Uthsava of Sri Rayaru in the Chariot, one felt that God Venkataramana Himself was enjoying Himself here. I saw large crowds, rows of shops and trees bearing fruits. I saw the great Guru in the Prakara.

When the great ascetic was coming riding the Chariot, I saw the wonderful sight of Brahmins joyfully reciting Bhagavata, Bharatha, Puranas and Upanishaths, while groups of good devotees were reciting the Rayara sthothra with enthusiasm.

Haridasas were singing and dancing with sweet voices accompanied by Thalas and Thamburis. Valagas, Bheris, Thammates and Bajamthris (varieties of drumming and wind musical instruments) were played and great big lights used during the day were also lit.

I extolled with great happiness at the sight of the Guru being carried in the very well decorated chariot with varieties and multitudes of sweet scented flower garlands and being offered coconuts, plantains and dates accompanied by Arathis.

(After completing the rounds and) coming to a stop in front of the Vrindavana, the great ascetic entered the Vrindavana with the crowds clapping loudly shouting Govinda, when he was offered Arathis again. How can a person of little intellect like myself describe the scene? I could only offer my prayers.

How can I describe his greatness – Gifting children to the childless women (by birth), curing Leprosy, removing and relieving hardships and giving desired gifts – which is unmatched in the whole world. I extolled his greatness.

The blind, lame, deaf and Dumb, and others affected by evil stars, come and offer sevas and our Guru relieves them of their suffering and quickly gives good results both for the worldly wants as well as for the other world. I praised the Guru to kindly protect us.

I could see Him with my own eyes only due to the fruition of Punyas accumulated over many lives and thus became gratified. The supplicant who offered prayers to the Guru becomes wealthy and happy and secures boons like progeny etc.

The great bath in the holy Thunga river, the sight of the greatest Guru, company of very good devotees, good meals with great dishes – where else on the earth can one see such happiness even after intensive search

When people praise the Guru in this manner, the flawless Abhinava Janardana Vittala (Supreme Being) will take us across the woods of worldly sufferings and gives us eternal bliss. After seeing the great ascetic till the very end and receiving the fruits and manthrakshathe, I went back to my village.